



ABŪ SAHL ZŪZANĪ

ABŪ SAHL MOḤAMMAD B. ḤOSAYN (or **ḤASAN**) **ZŪZANĪ**, courtier and official under the Ghaznavid amirs Maḥmūd (388-421/998-1030) and Mas'ūd (421-32/1031-41), d. ca. 440-50/1050-59 (see Reżā'ī, "Abū Sahl," pp. 221-22). He is known chiefly from references by his contemporary, the historian [Bayhaqī](#). His father was a religious scholar (Bayhaqī, 2nd ed., p. 222; cf. Manūčehrī, *Dīvān*, p. 107.10). Abū Sahl began as tutor to the children of Maḥmūd's vizier [Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Maymandī](#); he panegyricized the latter's successor, Abū 'Alī Ḥasan b. Moḥammad Mikāl Nīšāpūrī Ḥasanak (416-21/1025-30), and was selected as deputy (*kadkodā*) of Mas'ūd when the prince was appointed governor of Herat (Bayhaqī, 2nd ed., p. 230; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 128). Abū Sahl advanced in favor, and his rivals accused him of being a Carmathian—a charge Bayhaqī rejects (pp. 27-28, 230).

After Maḥmūd's death Abū Sahl fled from Ġazna to join Mas'ūd in Dāmḡān, although the latter was then poorly equipped to oppose the claim of his brother, Amir Moḥammad. Mas'ūd came to highly esteem his supporter and to discuss all his affairs with him; thus Abū Sahl became a sort of vizier and rose in prestige and influence. He also became feared, since he exercised his bent toward vengefulness, spite, and intrigue (*ibid.*, pp. 60, 80, 109). However, his attempt to slander [Abū Naṣr Moškān](#) failed (*ibid.*, p. 74).

After Mas'ūd's accession, Abū Sahl negotiated for the amir with Maymandī, who was newly released from prison, regarding the vizierate. Each politely deferred to the other's right to the office, and Maymandī clearly distrusted Abū Sahl's intentions (see his later letters to the amir, *ibid.*, pp. 183-84, 186-87).



After Maymandī was appointed, Abū Sahl pretended he would have been appointed if he had not brought in Maymandī, but he was not widely believed (ibid., pp. 188-90). At Maymandī's suggestion Abū Sahl was appointed as chief administrator of the army (ibid., p. 195). Not satisfied with this high post, he continued to incite the sultan against people he disliked or envied. He was the major force in obtaining the arrest and execution of the former vizier Ḥasanak (see the account in Bayhaqī, 2nd ed., pp. 221-36). He also promoted unsound policies. In spite of Maymandī's opposition, he helped persuade the sultan to reclaim the property and gifts distributed by Amir Moḥammad to various soldiers and prominent citizens to win their allegiance. Abū Sahl was put in charge of implementing this effort, and his extortionate demands alienated subjects from Mas'ūd and earned hatred for himself; his later regret made no impression (ibid., pp. 336-40).

Abū Sahl suggested to Mas'ūd that the [K̄vārazmšāh Āltūntāš](#) was ill-disposed towards the sultan, and he obtained a *farmān* instructing one of the commanders of the Khorasan army to arrest him. By chance the plot came to light, and the *farmān* fell into the hands of Āltūntāš. Fearing he would rebel, Mas'ūd was forced to order the arrest of Abū Sahl, who was brought in chains to Qohandez. Zūzanī's property and servants in Marv, Zūzan, Nišāpūr, Ġūr, Herat, Bādġīs, Ġazna, and Balḵ were sequestered (423/1032). Mas'ūd condemned Zūzanī in a letter designed to regain the confidence of Āltūntāš. Nevertheless, Bayhaqī is of the opinion that, when Khorasan fell out of Mas'ūd's hands into those of K̄vārazmšāh, it was as a result of Abū Sahl's earlier machinations (ibid., pp. 378, 402-24). In the course of the incident, Mas'ūd frequently referred to the malevolence of Abū Sahl (see, e.g., ibid., p. 420). In 424/1032-33 Abū Sahl was named as one of the candidates for the position of deputy in Ray, but Mas'ūd referred to his earlier record and declared he was fit for nothing but corrupt practices (ibid., pp. 499-500). When restored to Mas'ūd's entourage, Abū Sahl engaged in new machinations, earning the sultan's rebuke (ibid., pp. 561-63).

After Abū Naṣr Moškān died in 431/1040, Abū Sahl succeeded him as head of the secretariat and so regained administrative responsibility. Bayhaqī, viewing the change of personality and policy in the bureau, sought to resign his secretaryship but was refused by Mas'ūd. Until the amir's death Abū Sahl showed some respect toward the historian and sometimes aired to him complaints or boasts about Mas'ūd's attitude and behavior (ibid., pp. 820-22, 825, 831, 833). Rival courtiers tried to trap Abū Sahl by urging the amir to



assign him tasks which required a real knowledge of secretarial or accounting practices, but Bayhaqī came to his chief's rescue (*ibid.*, pp. 844-45). During the crisis of 431/1040 Abū Sahl was among the nobles who remained steadfast at Mas'ūd's side in the battle of Dandānaqān with the Saljuqs (*ibid.*, pp. 835, 839), and he advised the morose sultan to take direct and vigorous action against the invaders menacing Balk (*ibid.*, pp. 869-70). However, Mas'ūd imputed to him some responsibility for the rebellion of Abu'l-Faẓl Kornakī and forced him to leave for Bost to settle matters by negotiation or force. He returned to be reappointed to the secretariat by Sultan Mawdūd (432-41/1041-50), but little is known of Abū Sahl's subsequent activities (see *ibid.*, p. 640).

In his private life Abū Sahl loved pleasurable activities and the arts. Bayhaqī provides a glimpse of his entertainments (*ibid.*, pp. 785-89) and praises his literary accomplishments. These included the writing of Arabic poetry and prose (examples in Ṭa'ālebī, *Tatemmat al-yatīma*, ed. 'A. Eqbāl, Tehran, 1353/1934-35, II, pp. 65-66) and extempore verse (Bayhaqī, 2nd ed., pp. 152, 786-89; Navīd, "Ma'ākeḍ," pp. 135, 774). Mas'ūd's court poet, Manūčehrī Dāmḡānī, wrote two *qaṣīdas* in praise of him (*Dīvān*, pp. 106, 116).

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